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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: April 11, 2008

#### Fewer Asylum Applications since Schengen

11. Fears that Austria would receive a flood of asylum seekers after the enlargement of Europe's Schengen Zone appear to have been unfounded. The Interior Ministry in Vienna says there have been fewer applications for asylum in the three months since the borders opened in January 2008 than in the same period last year. Announcing the figures on Thursday, Interior Minister Guenther Platter (OeVP) said the scaremongers in association with Schengen had thus been discredited. Platter also said the number of asylum seekers sent back to the EU country in which they had first applied had increased significantly. At the same time that Austria's Interior Minister emphasized the fact that the number of applications for asylum has gone down since the enlargement of the Schengen Zone, Austrian industry leaders are backing immigration, saying the country can no longer sit back and watch qualified immigrants go elsewhere for work. Federation of Austrian Industry President Veit Sorger said: "Austria needs qualified immigrants for economic and business reasons. We cannot look on much longer as qualified specialists pass our country by and as less qualified persons enter many fields," semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung quotes. Commenting on an existing deficiency of specialists in Austria he added that more than 60 percent of enterprises struggle to find suitable personnel. The Federation is also set to push for a "set of provisions" to improve the Austrian economy, such as school and education reform, advancement of women and provisions to make jobs and family more compatible. Sorger said the Federation welcomed Interior Minister Guenther Platter's "Platform for integration and security" and the Integration Report, "because it addresses the fundamental parameters of successful integration." According to Sorger, the Federation was also pleased with the promotion of language programs and the possibility of quick entry into the education system for migrants. However, he criticized the existing quota system for immigrants and called for a "transparent, criteria based immigration system."

#### How the "Likeable Factor" Drives the US Election Campaign

12. In a PAS-facilitated interview with an Austrian English language radio station, US political analyst Amy Walter assessed trends and developments of this year's US presidential election campaign. She discussed the "likeable factor" of the three contestants, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain, and how that might affect their chances of winning. Walter also pointed out that as a result of the extremely long campaign; the "exhaustion factor" among the Democratic presidential hopefuls was already particularly high. The US media, meanwhile, are "more interested in the competition between

Clinton and Obama" than in the Republican candidate McCain, the expert said on ORF radio FM4 on March 31. In a PAS-facilitated interview aired on March 31 on Austrian English language radio station FM4, US political analyst Amy Walter discussed the three presidential hopeful's "likeable factor" influence on the election campaign: "Hillary Clinton is the most defined of the candidates. She is probably the least likeable. [When it comes to] the likeable factor, she has the highest negatives of the three candidates. She has this low ceiling, where a certain number of people like her, but also a certain number of people who will never like her. They've already made up their minds. There is very little in this election that will change anybody's mind about Hillary Clinton - like or dislike." Regarding Barack Obama, "he's much better liked, but the people have also said that they don't know much about him. So, he has what seems like an almost limitless ceiling. At the same time, we don't know where his floor goes, either. So it's a much more dramatic range than Hillary Clinton's. Low ceiling, but high floor: That is also John McCain. He is liked right now, people feel they do know him, he has high approval ratings, but he has not been defined, either." Meanwhile, with Clinton and Obama the "exhaustion factor is already quite "serious. Particularly in early morning interviews, they look worn out. I can't emphasize enough how atypical this election is." McCain "looks like he can rise above all this." His message seems to be: "While the 'Democrats are talking about petty little things and silly little debates, I can talk to world leaders, and I am putting forward my plan for foreign policy.' The problem, of course, is that the media is much more interested in the back and forth between Obama and Clinton. It's a story, it's still a race; McCain has a harder time getting coverage in the media. And when he does, the coverage he gets is often about his age. When he does get attention, it is not always positive. But he is doing two things: One, he is trying to look presidential, and he is using it to raise money. Remember, he is woefully behind the Democrats in terms of fundraising."

#### Darabos Wants To Extend Chad Deployment

13. Austria's Defense Minister Norbert Darabos (SPOe), who just returned from a visit to Chad, has called for an extension of the Austrian contingent's deployment to the EUFOR humanitarian assistance mission in the African country. The soldiers are scheduled to return home by summer this year, but Darabos says he wants them to remain until March 2009. Speaking to Austrian radio, Darabos explained he needs to "discuss and coordinate" his plan with the Foreign Minister and then with the other cabinet members. He believes the EUFOR troops "can effectively protect the refugees. Security in the region has already been established to a certain extent, simply because of the troops' presence there," the Minister said. EUFOR's main task - to protect the refugees in Chad's border region with Sudan - could take years to accomplish, according to ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal.

#### Democrats Blast Bush over Iraq

In the United States, the Democrats have harshly criticized a decision by President George Bush to suspend a planned withdrawal of troops from Iraq, which was due to begin after July. According to the President, the suspension will allow General David Petraeus to assess the next step in Iraq. Nanci Pelosi, the Democratic Speaker of the House, however, accused George Bush of putting off major decisions for the next US President and of failing to answer key questions, including "when are we going to bring the troops home? This is a question we have been asking the President over and over again. He is just dragging this out so we can put it at the doorstep of the new President of the United States," Austrian radio quotes her on ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal.

#### UNSG Won't Attend Olympics Opening

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon will not attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. A UN spokesperson said the decision had been taken some time ago, and was due to previous commitments. The Olympic torch relay has arrived in Argentina today, and the capital Buenos Aires is preparing for protests over China's

crackdown in Tibet. Meanwhile, UN special rapporteur on torture Manfred Nowak has harshly criticized Beijing for not allowing the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Tibet to assess the situation there, liberal daily Der Standard writes.

Kilner